

The Mystery of the Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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(Continued From Last Sunday.)

"All right," I said. "But, again—what made you so sure?"

"Because, at half-past 11, I had proof that Mademoiselle Stangerson was making as many efforts to permit of the murderer's entrance as Monsieur Robert Darzac had taken precautions against it."

"Is that possible?" I cried. "Haven't you told me that Mademoiselle Stangerson loves Monsieur Robert Darzac?"

"I told you so because it is the truth."

"Then do you see nothing strange—"

"Everything in this business is strange, my friend; but take my word for it, the strangeness you now feel is nothing to the strangeness that is to come."

"It must be admitted, then," I said, "that Mademoiselle Stangerson and her murderer are in communication—at any rate in writing?"

"Admit it, my friend, admit it! You don't risk anything," I told you about the letter left on her table on the night of the inexplicable gallery affair—the letter that disappeared—into the pocket of Mademoiselle Stangerson. Why should it have been a summons to a meeting? Might it be not, as soon as he was sure of Darzac's absence, appoint the meeting for the coming night?"

"And my friend laughed silently. There are moments when I ask myself if he is not laughing at me."

The door of the inn opened. Roulettable was on his feet so suddenly that one might have thought he had received an electric shock.

"Mr. Arthur Rance," he cried.

Mr. Arthur Rance stood before us calmly bowing.

CHAPTER XX.

An Act of Mademoiselle Stangerson.

"You remember me, monsieur," asked Roulettable.

"Perfectly," replied Arthur Rance. "I recognize you as the lad at the bar. The face of Roulettable crimsoned at being called a 'lad.' I want to shake hands with you. You are a bright little fellow."

The American extended his hand and Roulettable, relaxing his frown, shook it and introduced Mr. Arthur Rance to me. He invited him to share our meal.

No thanks, I breakfasted with Monsieur Stangerson."

Arthur Rance spoke French perfectly—almost without an accent.

"I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you again, monsieur. I thought you were to have left France the day after the reception at the Elisee."

Roulettable and I, outwardly indifferent, listened most intently for every word the American would say.

The man's purplish red face, his heavy eyelids, the nervous twitches, all spoke of his addiction to drink. How come it that so sorry a specimen of a man should be so intimate with Monsieur Stangerson?

Some days later I learned from Frederic Larsan—who, like ourselves, was surprised and mystified by his appearance and reception at the chateau—that Mr. Rance had been an inmate for about fifteen years; only that is to say, since the professor and his daughter left Philadelphia. During the time the Stangersons lived in America they were very intimate with Arthur Rance, who was one of the most distinguished phenologists of the new world. Owing to new experiments, he had made enormous strides beyond the

science of Gall and Lavater. The friendliness with which he was received at the chateau had been explained by the fact that he had rendered Mademoiselle Stangerson a great service by stopping at the peril of his own life, the runaway horse of her carriage. The immediate result of that could, however, have been no more than a mere friendly association with the Stangersons; certainly not a love affair.

Frederic Larsan did not tell me where he had picked up this information, but he appeared to be quite sure of what he said.

I had known these facts at the time Arthur Rance met us at the Donjon Inn. His presence at the chateau might not have puzzled us, but they could not have failed to increase our interest in the man himself. The American must have been at least forty-five years old. He spoke in a perfectly natural tone in reply to Roulettable's question.

"I put off my return to America when I heard of the attack on Mademoiselle Stangerson. I wanted to be certain the lady had not been killed, and I shall not go away until she is perfectly recovered."

Arthur Rance then took the lead in talking, paying no heed to some of Roulettable's questions. He gave us, without our inviting him, his personal views on the subject of the tragedy—views which, as well as I could make out, were not far from those held by Frederic Larsan. The American also thought that Robert Darzac had something to do with the matter. He did not mention him by name, but there was no room to doubt whom he meant.

Young Roulettable was making up the young, ravel the tangled skein of the Yellow Room mystery. He explained that Monsieur Stangerson had related to him all that had taken place in the inexplicable gallery. He several times expressed his regret at Monsieur Darzac's absence from the chateau on all these occasions, and thought that Monsieur Darzac had done cleverly in allying himself with Monsieur Joseph Joseph, who could not fail, sooner or later, to discover the murderer. He spoke the last sentence with unconcealed irony. Then he rose, bowed to us, and left the inn.

Roulettable watched him through the window.

"An odd fish, that," he said.

"Do you think he'll pass the night at the Glandier?" I asked.

To my amazement the young reporter answered that it was a matter for entire indifference to him whether he did or not.

As to how we spent our time during the afternoon, all I need say is that Roulettable led me to the grotto of Sainte-Genieve, and, all the time, talked of the dinner table, with which we were most interested. Towards evening I was surprised to find Roulettable making none of the preparations I had expected him to make. I spoke to him about it when he came on, and we were once more in his room. He replied that all his arrangements had already been made, and this time the murderer would not get away from him.

I expressed some doubt on this, reminding him of his disappearance in the gallery, and suggested that the same phenomenon might occur again.

He answered that he hoped it would. He desired nothing more. I did not insist. Knowing by experience how useless that would have been. He told

me that, with the help of the concierges, the chateau had since early dawn, been watched in such a way that nobody could approach it without knowing it, and that he had no concern for those who might have left it, and remained without.

It was then 8 o'clock by his watch. He made a sign to me to follow him, and, without in the least trying to conceal his movements or the sound of his footsteps, he led me through the gallery. We reached the 'right' gallery and came to the landing place, which we crossed. We then continued our way in the gallery of the left, passing Professor Stangerson's apartment.

At the far end of the gallery, before coming to the donjon, is the room occupied by Arthur Rance. We knew that because we had seen him at the window looking out on the court. The door of the room was on the end of the gallery, exactly facing the right window, at the extremity of the 'right' gallery, where Roulettable had placed Daddy Jacques, and commands an uninterrupted view of the gallery from end to end of the chateau.

"That 'off-turning' gallery," said Roulettable, "I reserve for myself, when I tell you you'll come and take your place here."

He made me enter a little dark, triangular door built in a bay of the wall, to the left of the door of Arthur Rance's room. From this recess I could see all that occurred in the gallery as well as if I had been standing in front of the door. The door, and I could watch that door, too. The door of the closet, which was to be my place of observation, was fitted with panels of transparent glass. In the gallery, where all the lamps had been lit, it was quite light. The closet, however, it was quite dark.

A splendid place from which to observe and remain unobserved.

I was soon to play the part of a spy—a common policeman. I wonder what my leader at the moment had said had he known I was not altogether pleased with my duties, but I could not refuse Roulettable the assistance he had begged me to give him. I took care not to make him see that I in the least objected to several reasons. I wanted to oblige him; I did not wish him to think me a coward; I was filled with curiosity; and it was too late for me to draw back. I had determined to do so. That I had not done so, scruples sooner because my curiosity had quite got the better of me. I might also urge that I was helping to save the life of a woman, and even a lawyer may do that conscientiously.

We returned along the gallery. On reaching the door of Mademoiselle Stangerson's apartment, it opened from a push given to the steward who was waiting at the dinner table (Monsieur Stangerson had, for the last three days, dined with his daughter in the drawing-room on the first floor). As the door remained open we distinctly saw Mademoiselle Stangerson, taking advantage of the steward's absence, and while her father was sleeping to pick up something he had left fall, pour the contents of a phial into Monsieur Stangerson's glass.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the Watch.

The act, which staggered me, did not appear to effect Roulettable much. We returned to his room and, without even referring to what we had seen, he gave me his final instructions for the night. First we were to go to dinner; after dinner I was to take my stand in the dark closet and wait there as long as it was necessary—to look out for what might happen.

"If you see anything before I do," he explained, "you must let me know. If the man gets into the 'right' gallery by any other way than the 'off-turning' gallery, you will see him before I shall, because you have a view along the whole length of the 'right' gallery, while I can only command a view of the 'off-turning' gallery. All you need do to let me know is to undo the cord holding the curtain of the 'right' gallery window nearest to the dark closet. The curtain will fall of itself and immediately leave a square of shadow where previously there had been a square of light. To do this, you need but stretch your hand out of the closet and pull under your signal perfectly."

"And then?"

"Then you will see me coming round the corner of the 'off-turning' gallery."

"What am I to do then?"

"You will immediately come towards me, behind the man; but I shall already be upon him and shall have seen his face."

I attempted a feeble smile.

"Why do you smile? Well, you may smile while you have the chance, but I swear you'll have no time for that a few hours from now."

"And if the man escapes?"

"So much the better," said Roulettable coolly. "I don't want to capture him. He may take himself off any way he can. I will let him go—after I have seen his face. That's all I want. I shall know afterwards what to do so that as far as Mademoiselle Stangerson is concerned I shall be dead to her even though he continues to live. If I took him alive, Mademoiselle Stangerson and Robert Darzac would, perhaps, never forgive me! And I wish to retain their good-will and respect."

"Seeing, as I have just now seen, Mademoiselle Stangerson pour a narcotic into her father's glass, so that he might not be awake to interrupt the conversation she is going to have with her murderer, you can imagine she would not be grateful to me if I brought the man of the Yellow Room and the inexplicable gallery, bound and gagged, to her father. I realize now that if I am to save the unhappy lady, I must silence the man and not capture him. To kill a human being is no small thing. Besides, that's not my business, unless the man himself makes it my business. On the other hand, to render him forever silent without the lady's assent and confidence is to act on one's own initiative and assumes a knowledge of everything with nothing for a basis. Fortunately, my friend, I have guessed, no, I have reasoned it all out. All that I ask of the man who is coming to-night is to bring me his face, so that it may enter—"

"Into the circle?"

"Exactly! And his face won't surprise me!"

"But I thought you saw his face on the night when you sprang into the chamber?"

"Only imperfectly. The candle was on the floor, and his beard—"

"Will he wear his beard this evening?"

"I think I can say for certain that he will. But the gallery is light and now, I know—at least, my brain knows—and my eyes will see."

"If we are here only to see him and let him escape, why are we armed?"

"Because, if the man of the Yellow

Room and the inexplicable gallery knows that I know, he is capable of doing anything! We should then have to defend ourselves."

"And you are sure he will come to-night?"

"As sure as that you are standing there! This morning at half-past 10 o'clock Mademoiselle Stangerson, in the clearest way in the world, arranged to have no nurse to-night. She gave them leave of absence for twenty-four hours, under some plausible pretext, and did not desire anybody to be with her but her father, who is away. Her father, who is to sleep in the boudoir, has gladly consented to the arrangement. Darzac's departure and what he told me, as well as the extraordinary precautions Mademoiselle Stangerson is taking to be alone to-night, leaves me no room for doubt. She has prepared the way for the coming of the man whom Darzac dreads."

"That's awful!"

"It is!"

"And what we saw her do was done to send her father to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Then there are but two of us for to-night's work?"

"Four: the concierges and his wife will watch at all hazards. I don't set much value on them before—but the concierges may be useful after—if there's to be any killing."

"Then you think there may be?"

"If he wishes it."

"Why haven't you brought in Daddy Jacques?—Have you made no use of him to-day?"

"No," replied Roulettable sharply. "I kept silence for a while, then, anxious to know his thoughts, I asked him point blank."

"Why not tell Arthur Rance?—He may be of great assistance to us?"

"Oh!" said Roulettable crossly. "Then you want to let everybody into Mademoiselle Stangerson's secrets?—Come, let us go to dinner; it is time."

This evening we dined in Frederic Larsan's room—at least, if he is not on the heels of Darzac. He sticks to him like a leech. But, anyhow, if he is not there now, I am quite sure he will be to-night. He's the one I am going to knock out."

At this moment we heard a noise in the room near us.

"It must be he," said Roulettable. "I forgot to ask you," I said, "if we are to make any allusion to to-night's business when we are with this police-

man. I take it we are not. Is that so?"

"Evidently. We are going to operate alone, on our own personal account."

"So that all the glory will be ours?" Roulettable laughed.

We dined with Frederic Larsan in his room. He told us he had just come in, and invited us to be seated at table. We ate our dinner in the heat of humors, and I had no difficulty in appreciating the feelings of certainty which both Roulettable and Larsan felt. Roulettable told the great Fred that I had come on a chance visit, and that he had asked me to stay and help him in the heavy batch of writing he had to get through for the "Epique."

I was going back to Paris, he said, by the 11 o'clock train, taking his "copy," which took a story form, recounting the principal episodes in the mysteries of the Glandier. Larsan smiled at the explanation like a man who was not fooled and politely refrained from making the slightest remark on matters which did not concern him.

With infinite precautions as to the words they used, and even as to the tones of their voices, Larsan and Roulettable discussed, for a long time, Mr. Arthur Rance's appearance at the chateau, and his put in an American, about which they expressed a desire to know more, at any rate, so far as his relations with the Stangersons. At one time Larsan, who appeared to me to be unwell, said, with an effort, "Do you sleep to-night?"

"I think, Monsieur Roulettable, that we've not much more to do at the Glandier, and that we shouldn't sleep here any more nights."

"I think so, too, Monsieur Fred."

"Then you think the conclusion of the matter has been reached?"

"I think, indeed, that we have nothing more to find out," replied Roulettable.

"Have you found your criminal?" asked Larsan.

"Have you?"

"So have I," said Roulettable. "Can it be the same man?"

"I don't know if you have answered your original idea," said the young reporter. Then he added, with emphasis: "Monsieur Darzac is an honest man!"

"Are you sure of that?" asked Larsan.

"I am sure of it," said Roulettable.

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gan. "Well, I am sure he is not. So it's a fight then?"

"Yes, it is a fight. But I shall beat you, Monsieur Frederic Larsan."

"Youth never doubts anything," said the great Fred laughingly, and held out his hand to me by way of conclusion.

Roulettable's answer came like an echo.

"Not anything!"

Suddenly Larsan, who had risen to wish us good-night, pressed both his hands to his chest and staggered. He was obliged to lean on Roulettable for support, and to save himself from falling.

"Oh, Oh!" he cried. "What is the matter with me?—Have I been poisoned?"

We questioned him vainly; he did not answer us. He had sunk into an armchair and we could get not a word from him. We were extremely distressed, both on his account and on our own, for we had partaken of all the dishes he had eaten. He seemed to be out of pain, but his heavy head had fallen on his shoulder, and his eyelids were tightly closed. Roulettable bent over him, listening for the beatings of the heart.

My friend's face, however, when he stood up, was as calm as it had been a moment before agitated.

"He is asleep," he said.

He led me to his chamber, after closing Larsan's room.

"The drug?" I asked. "Does Mademoiselle Stangerson wish to put everybody to sleep to-night?"

"Perhaps," replied Roulettable; but I could see he was thinking of something else.

"What about us?" I exclaimed. "How do we know that we have not been drugged?"

"Do you feel indisposed?" Roulettable asked me coolly.

"Not in the least."

"Do you feel any inclination to go to sleep?"

"None whatever."

"Well, then, my friend, smoke this excellent cigar."

And he handed me a choice Havana, one Monsieur Darzac had given him, while he lit his briarwood—his eternal briarwood.

We remained in his room until about 10 o'clock without a word passing between us. Buried in an armchair, Roulettable sat and smoked steadily, his brow in thought and a far-away look in his eyes. On the stroke of 10 he took off his boots and signed to me to do the same. Standing in our socks, he held in his right hand a tone that I guessed, rather than heard, the word:

"Revolver."

I drew my revolver from my jacket pocket.

"Cook it," he said.

I did as he directed.

Then moving towards the door of his room, he opened it with infinite precaution; it made no sound. We were in the "off-turning" gallery. Roulettable made another sign to me which I understood to mean that I was to take up my post in the dark closet.

When I was some distance from him he rejoined me and embraced me; and then I saw him, with the same precaution, return to his room. Astonished by his embrace, and somewhat disquieted by it, I retired to the right gallery without difficulty, crossing the landing-place, and reaching the dark closet.

Before entering it I examined the curtain-cord of the window and found that I had only to release it from its fastening with my fingers for the curtain to fall by its own weight and hide the square of light from Roulettable—the signal agreed upon. The sound of a footstep made me halt before Arthur Rance's door. He was not yet in bed, then! How was it that, being in the chateau, he had not dined with Monsieur Stangerson and his daughter? I had not seen him at table with them, at the moment when we looked in.

I crept into the dark closet. I found myself perfectly situated. I could see along the whole length of the gallery. Nothing, absolutely nothing, could pass there without my seeing it. But what was going to pass there? Roulettable's embrace came back to my mind. I argued that people don't part from each other that way unless on an important or dangerous occasion. Was I then in danger?

My hand closed on the butt of my revolver and I waited. I am not a hero, but neither am I a coward.

I waited about an hour, and during all that time I saw nothing unusual. The rain, which had begun to come down strongly towards 9 o'clock, had now ceased.

My friend had told me that, probably, nothing would occur before midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning. It was not more than half-past 11, however, when I heard the door of Arthur Rance's room open very slowly. The door remained open for a minute, which seemed to me a long time. As it opened into the gallery, that is to say, outwards, I could not see what was passing in the room behind the door.

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